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## SOME REMARKS ON "TWO COMMON FALLACIES IN THE LOGIC OF RELIGION"

**A** PHILOSOPHY of religion can be built up only by the use of a valid logical method. If the logic be defective, the philosophy will be but "dogmatic slumber." It is, therefore, necessary to examine critically the "pragmatic fallacy" and the "fallacy of false attribution," to which Professor Wells has recently called attention.<sup>1</sup>

## I

The "pragmatic fallacy" arises "from a confusion between the value and the truth of religious beliefs."<sup>2</sup> That is to say, it consists in passing directly from the value to the truth of a belief, in presupposing that a valuable belief is, because valuable, therefore true. It is evident that Professor Wells intends the "pragmatic fallacy" to mean more than is given on the face of this definition of the fallacy. He evidently means to make a clean-cut separation between logic, the science of truth, and axiology (he does not use the term), the science of value.<sup>3</sup> "Truth is definable in terms of consistency among beliefs or propositions, or of correspondence with facts," whereas value is coming to be defined "in terms of organic interests," "desire," or "liking."<sup>4</sup> What have organic interests, mere feelings, to do with correspondence with facts? Nay more, in whatever terms value be defined, whether in Mr. Russell's or Mr. Moore's or Mr. Palmer's or, presumably, in any other's whosoever, the distinction between truth and value still obtains. In the value of a belief one can discern no scintilla of light regarding its truth.

There is for Professor Wells a relation between the sciences of truth and of value. In the case of "scientific" beliefs—beliefs about "details of the physical environment"—the truth of any particular belief determines its value; untrue beliefs about facts capable of empirical verification are not valuable. He describes such beliefs as "beliefs that must be true in order to be valuable."<sup>5</sup> In order to make clear precisely what he means by this statement, substituting his definitions for his terms, we must read, "beliefs that must correspond to details of the physical environment in order to be liked or desired." Can Professor Wells really intend this? The small boy might readily like, desire, and be satisfied by safe ice, even though any particular empirical ice on which he skated might be, like the horse, a vain thing for safety. If we insist that thin ice

<sup>1</sup> This JOURNAL, Vol. XIV., pp. 653 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 653.

<sup>3</sup> *Cf. loc. cit.*, pp. 653-654.

<sup>4</sup> *Cf. loc. cit.*, pp. 655-656.

lacks biological value, we are using "value" in a sense that has nothing to do with value as liking or desire. Thin though the ice might be, the boy, as long as he could gasp, might still desire to live! Desire-for-life and actual-preservation-of-life or destruction-of-life can not mutually verify or refute each other. On Professor Wells's premises, one can not see why beliefs about physical facts in order to be valuable must be true.

Turning now to the field of religion, he contends that in the case of "metaphysical" beliefs there can be no relation between fact and value; for "metaphysical" objects are not empirically verifiable.<sup>5</sup> (It is implied that, if verification were possible, value would be, as in the case of scientific beliefs, dependent on fact.) Untrue "metaphysical" beliefs (such as the belief in God, if there be no God) "can have no bad indirect objective effect," but may have "direct subjective effects" of positive biological value. These propositions reveal a shift in the concept of value from "liking," "desire," "interest," or "satisfaction" to a definition that would run somewhat as follows: "A belief has value if it has 'good' biological effects." Value has now become survival-value,<sup>6</sup> or, more accurately, the-fact-of-aiding-survival.

Let us see whether this has led us. We were originally warned against the "pragmatic fallacy," the inference that a belief is true because it has value. We have now been told that "to have value" means either to-be-desired or to-aid-in-survival. These two concepts are not identical; for while survival is in general doubtless desired,<sup>7</sup> it might often—and in religion usually does—happen that the valuable belief has no conscious relation to biological survival. "What-is-desired" may be communion with God, or eternal life; the fact that such beliefs aid in survival is precisely a fact, having no relevance to the belief as valuable (*i. e.*, as interesting). Now, we must hold Professor Wells rigidly to the psychological, rather than to the biological, definition; for the latter is concerned only with fact, in his sense, *i. e.*, with physical details. The "pragmatic fallacy," therefore, is the argument that a belief is true because we desire it to be true. It is obvious that here we have a fallacy, a fallacy so obviously fallacious that even the wayfaring evangelist, to say nothing of philosophers of religion, can rarely be charged with committing it.

Lest one accuse me of an ungenerous literalism, I hasten to admit that there is, in a broader sense, a pragmatic fallacy. To infer that the object of any chance belief exists because belief in that object is valuable, or because that object, if existing, would have value—to make such an inference is fallacious.

<sup>5</sup> *Cf. loc. cit.*, p. 655.

<sup>6</sup> *Cf. loc. cit.*, p. 655, especially the last sentence.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 654, note 3.

Nevertheless, the relation between truth and value in the field of religion may be much closer than Professor Wells admits, without being as close as Mr. Schiller believes it is.<sup>8</sup> For Professor Wells, the complete diremption of fact and value rests on the essential unverifiability of religious beliefs; this rests on the conception of "verifiable" fact as confined to sense-objects; and this in turn rests on the definition of truth as "correspondence with facts."<sup>9</sup> But his discussion began with two definitions of truth; truth was *either* "consistency among beliefs or propositions" *or* "correspondence with facts." The discussion, as we have found, is based entirely on the second of these alternative definitions, which Professor Wells actually employs as a criterion of truth. The whole point of his criticism of the "pragmatic fallacy" turns on this fact. If the criterion of truth be correspondence with sense-objects, then all value (being mere "liking" or "desire") is irrelevant to truth. But perhaps correspondence with reality is not a criterion of truth at all, but rather what Professor Wells originally called it, the definition of truth. In any event, one who still accepts the view that consciousness exists (James and many contemporaries to the contrary notwithstanding), and is an epistemological dualist, could never admit correspondence with (outer) reality as a criterion. Advisedly, I have changed Professor Wells's word "facts" to "reality," in order to avoid the presupposition that physical objects are the whole of reality. From this standpoint, the first formulation of the definition of truth, as "consistency among beliefs or propositions" (or, let us say, judgments) may turn out to be the criterion of truth. Then we should regard sense-data, not as the reality to which all truth must correspond, but as judgments to be built up into a rational system; many of which, as given, may be, and often are, false, or falsely interpreted. Only by relating any given judgment to the total system of our judgments can we judge as to its truth or falsity.

Let the criterion of truth for our argument be rational consistency and nothing else (*pace* pragmatism). Then obviously only judgments could have the right to be treated as true or false. If there are or could be any states of consciousness not judgment in character, they would have no relevance for truth. They would make no "truth-claim," would have no reference to reality, and could be tested by no criterion of truth. They would be brute data of the mental life.

The crucial question now arises: is valuation a form of judgment? If it be mere subjective desiring (granted the possibility of

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 653.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*, pp. 653-654.

such a state) it may be perhaps only a brute datum. But in proving that value in this sense has no significance for truth, Professor Wells would not thereby demonstrate that value in all possible senses is equally irrelevant. Perhaps valuing is not merely a psychological accompaniment of an independently true or false judgment. It may be itself a way of judging reality. Value may be in some sense objective, or objectively valid. From Plato to contemporary discussion in this JOURNAL, the view has been held by many thinkers that a value is a value, whether I know it or not, and whether I like it or not. Its validity is as objective as the existence of the Great War. Any given value judgment, then, is either true or untrue of the objective system of values, just as any existential judgment is either true or untrue of the objective system of existence.

On this view, reality is a system of validity and existence, of value and fact. If the criterion of truth be rational consistency, then perhaps truth will include both existential and value judgments: and if truth correspond to reality, perhaps reality will possess both existence and value. The "pragmatic fallacy" remains a fallacy in the sense that it would be unsound to argue that any chance value judgment is true merely because it is a value judgment. But over against the "pragmatic" may be set the equally illogical "scientific" fallacy of assuming that only existential judgments are relevant to truth. If a consistent system of existential judgments may be built up, but never completed, so perhaps may a consistent system of value judgments be constructed. Both systems will be true of reality for the sole reason of their rational consistency within themselves and with each other. Philosophy of religion and "the special science of value" have yet a long way to go before the system of value is worked out; and a still longer way, before the relations between the two systems are understood. That there is some relation seems to be a reasonable assumption. "The world of description" and "the world of appreciation" (as Royce calls them) are rational activities of one mind dealing with one reality. In any case, a description of reality is not complete truth until we know the truth about its value; and *vice versa*. The "Sein" and the "Sein sollen," can not be, or at least ought not to be, ultimately dissevered.

Religion will always be more interested in reality as value than in reality as fact. But religious life could never exist, nor could religious logic prosper, on the basis of a complete disjunction of truth and value. Höffding, for example, interprets his axiom of "the conservation of values" as meaning that "the content of faith is that fidelity prevails throughout *existence*."<sup>10</sup> Hocking makes "love of

<sup>10</sup> H. Höffding, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p. 216. Italics mine.

reality," "our whole-idea," "the God-idea," and value very closely related, if not identical concepts.<sup>11</sup>

Hence we can not "content ourselves by saying that unverifiable religious beliefs possess value or disvalue,"<sup>12</sup> for if they possess *true* value they have been "verified" by the use of the criterion of logical consistency. Further, the existential judgment implied in the religious belief may, if it has any relation to our other judgments, be tested by the same criterion. Philosophy of religion can never rest "content" until it finds some consistent way of understanding reality—existence and value—as a whole. "Man's need of metaphysics" can never be met by a veto.

## II

Professor Wells discusses also "the fallacy of false attribution," which "arises from the attribution of the so-called religious experience to outside, 'higher' forces in cases where, in reality, the cause of the experience is merely physiological—from 'below' and not from 'above.'" It consists in "the erroneous interpretation of an experience whereby the experience is attributed to an external, divine source in cases where a physiological explanation is adequate to account for the experience."<sup>13</sup> Professor Wells will probably accept as an amendment the term "psycho-physiological," for physiological causes alone would never make Kipling's hero<sup>13</sup> see a camel if he had never consciously or "subconsciously" experienced camel.

This fallacy rests on an assumed "either-or." Any fact in human life, Professor Wells takes for granted, is conceivably due either to natural or to supernatural causation;<sup>14</sup> either to psycho-physiological causes or to God. If one, not the other. God, if there be a God, can have nothing to do with phenomena; he must be an "absentee." But the "fallacy of false attribution" is a fallacy only on the assumption of this dualistic deism as the only possible philosophy of religion.

Suppose that we turn from dualistic deism to a different metaphysical hypothesis, at least equally well known. On this other hypothesis, any event in the world of time is capable of being explained from two standpoints: first, the standpoint of its relation to previous events in the temporal series (in which case we have the "phenomenal" cause, say, of a mystical state, in psycho-biological

<sup>11</sup> W. E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, pp. 126, 129, 136, *et passim*.

<sup>12</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 656.

<sup>13</sup> *Loc. cit.*, pp. 653, 657.

<sup>14</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 658. "The natural or supernatural origin . . . is very relevant indeed." Italic mine.

terms); and second, the standpoint of its relation to metaphysical reality (in which case we see the same mystical state as an aspect or activity of the real, or the divine). For such a view it is rigorously logical to say that an event has a psycho-physiological cause, and also that that event is a divine act. The question as to the cause of an event is not the critical question for a religious idealism.<sup>15</sup> Of course every event has a phenomenal cause; equally of course every event is a manifestation, an expression, an act of the divine.<sup>16</sup> The real question is not as to the cause, but as to the value of the event for the religious soul, and objectively for the divine reality. Kipling's camel—"jims" were divinely caused, but were of value only as expressing the rationality of divine law in the matter of stimulants and their effect!

It would follow that the "fallacy of false attribution" is a fallacy only from the standpoint of a positivist who rejects all metaphysics, or of a deist who finds the divine only in lawless interventions in the course of nature. A positivist is under bonds to find the divine nowhere; a deist, to find it only in what can not be accounted for on the basis of natural law. For a theist, or a pantheist, or a religious idealist, say, of Lotze's type, there is no "fallacy of false attribution"; such thinkers would be concerned to warn against the fallacy of confusing phenomenal with metaphysical causes.

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### THE VALIDITY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

I WISH to offer some brief criticisms of Mr. W. R. Wells's distinction between scientific and metaphysical beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Scientific beliefs, he says, are capable of empirical verification, in terms of sense-experiences which reveal objects corresponding to these beliefs. Such beliefs must be true in order to be valuable, and are valueless if false. For example, the belief that the ice is safe can be verified by stepping on to the ice and finding that it will bear one up: if the ice does not bear the experimenter up, then the belief is not only false, but harmful. Metaphysical, including religious, beliefs, on the other hand, are, according to Mr. Wells, incapable of empirical veri-

<sup>15</sup> This disregards for simplicity's sake all questions regarding freedom.

<sup>16</sup> Even Kant, who normally means by "cause" phenomenal antecedent in time, also uses the term of the transcendental object, "that purely intelligible cause of phenomena in general." (*Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Max Müller, p. 403.)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. this JOURNAL, Vol. XIV., pp. 653-660